MORTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Kyle L. Kirchmeier, Sheriff

For Immediate Release
December 28, 2016
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Five arrested for criminal trespass as protestors fail to uphold agreement

Mandan, N.D. – On Tuesday, Dec. 27, protestors showed they were not willing to uphold their end of an agreement made on December 4 between Morton County Law Enforcement and tribal leaders to de-escalate conflict. As part of the agreement, Law Enforcement moved away from the north side of the Backwater Bridge and would stay back as long as protestors stayed off the bridge and did not instigate conflict.

At approximately 1:00pm yesterday, the Morton County Sheriff's Department responded to a group of approximately 11 protestors near the Cannonball River east of Turtle Hill. Law Enforcement ordered the protestors to stay on the south side of the river as crossing to the north would be trespassing on US Army Corps of Engineers land. Despite numerous orders by Law Enforcement to stay on the south side or be arrested, seven protestors crossed the Cannonball River. Once the protestors walked about 100 yards north of the Cannonball River, Law Enforcement arrested five for criminal trespass and other outstanding warrants. They were transported to the Morton County Detention Center.

At 2:00pm, approximately 20 protestors and two vehicles came onto the Backwater Bridge and some were observed tampering with the wire barricade and consequently crossed to the north side. Those that crossed to the north side of the barrier were observed breaking the lenses on a light tower. They also vandalized the light's generator. When Law Enforcement responded to the Backwater Bridge, the protestors fled.

"As long as Law Enforcement believes there is a threat from protestors who come onto the Backwater Bridge, the barricade will not be removed," said Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier. "Actions by protestors yesterday are proving they are not willing to be peaceful, and are certainly not respectful of our mutual agreement."

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At approximately 3:00pm, Law Enforcement received word that the camp was "calling all warriors to Turtle Hill." Law Enforcement observed approximately 80 protestors came to Turtle Hill with many climbing to the top. Law Enforcement overheard differing messages from protestors indicating some dissension amidst the camps, from some saying they were getting their rifles to others urging their fellow protestors to stay peaceful. Around 4:00pm the protestors left Turtle Hill.

At 5:45pm when approximately 100 protestors gathered at the Backwater Bridge, Law Enforcement took the earlier threat of rifles very seriously and consequently responded with a Bearcat and SWAT team. Protestors tampered with the barricade wire, pulling on it with ropes and attempting to cut it. Several protestors pulled out the Department of Transportation No Trespassing sign on the west side of the bridge and carried it back to a vehicle and drove away. As protestors worked to remove the sign, Law Enforcement repeatedly told them to stop as they were stealing state property so when they did not stop, Law Enforcement deployed three sponge less-than-lethal munitions on the west side of the bridge.

View video of protestors stealing the sign (watch bottom right of screen):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZup-LUzMC0

At 7:00pm, protestors left the Backwater Bridge. A few protestors returned periodically in the evening to the Backwater Bridge to continue cutting the barrier wire until Law Enforcement responded and then they fled.

Yesterday's arrests bring the total number of arrests to 577 since Dakota Access Pipeline protests began.

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